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May 1965

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INTELLIGENCE BRIEF

A COMMUNIST "PEACE CORPS"?

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

Office of Research and Reports

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A COMMUNIST "PEACE CORPS"?

After years of attacking the US Peace Corps as another instrument of neocolonialism, the Communist countries apparently have launched similar programs of their own, drawing largely on domestic youth groups to staff these organizations. Although there are indications that these programs will soon become widespread, to date this activity primarily has been concentrated in Algeria. In late April 1965, 118 Soviet student "volunteers" departed for Algeria to bring to more than 460 the number of volunteers from the USSR and the Eastern European Communist countries who have gone to Algeria since mid-1964 to participate in the reconstruction of at least four villages in the Kabylie region that were destroyed during the Algerian struggle for independence.

1. Focus on Algeria

The first evidence of a Communist undertaking similar to that of the US Peace Corps occurred in July 1964, when about 220 Soviet Komsomol "volunteers," accompanied by 12 Soviet engineers and equipped with "compressors, pneumatic drills, tractors, trucks, and 1,700 picks and shovels," arrived in Algeria for a 6-month tour to assist in a village rebuilding program, the construction of a number of agricultural cooperative centers, and the reclamation of about 2,500 acres of land. The Soviet labor brigades were soon followed by nearly 100 Bulgarian, Czechoslovak, and East German youths who were to contribute their skills as construction technicians, electricians, masons, architects, and agricultural specialists for a period of about 3 months. The Abbane Ramdane Volunteer Work Camp was set up near Ouadhias, one of the villages to be rebuilt, to house the youths from the Communist countries as well as 2,000 volunteers from Algeria's own youth organizations. After completion of the rebuilding of the first village in late December 1964, 112 Soviet youths returned to the USSR. These volunteers were replaced late in April 1965 by 12 engineers and construction technicians and 118 students from Construction Institutes in Moscow, Leningrad, and a number of other Soviet cities.

Although the Soviet youth organizations have dominated Communist activity in Algeria, the endeavor has taken on the appearance of an effort of international Communist youth. In addition to the volunteers from the USSR and the Eastern European Communist countries, about

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20 Yugoslavs and members of Communist-oriented youth organizations in France, Mali, and Morocco also were sent as volunteers to work at Ouadhias. Arrangements apparently are being made to permit participants at the Communist-front World Youth Festival in Algiers in June to remain to work in Algeria. For example, members of the Union of Communist Students of France will spend about 8 weeks working at agricultural and industrial facilities near Constantine. The Soviet delegation of 130 students will be employed in the Kabylie region's rebuilding program after completion of the Festival.

The concentration of these undertakings in Algeria coincides with the acceleration since 1963 of what appears to be a major Soviet effort to establish a decisive physical presence in a country of increasing importance and influence in Afro-Asian affairs.* Algeria was host to the recent Afro-Asian economic seminar and the preparatory meeting of the Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organization and has been selected as the site for the forthcoming meetings of the World Youth Festival and the second Afro-Asian Conference (Bandung II). In spite of Chinese Communist efforts to bar the "white-European Russians," Ben Bella has been a staunch defender of Soviet participation in these councils.

2. Plans to Expand Communist "Peace Corps" Activities

Although Communist "Peace Corps" activities thus far appear to be concentrated in Algeria, there is evidence that the Communist countries are planning to undertake similar programs throughout the less developed world. One recent report, for example, indicates that the USSR has in fact already organized a "Peace Corps" to counter the US initiative in this field. About 100 Soviet youths reportedly are preparing to leave for work in various Afro-Asian countries.

* Although Algeria accounts for less than 5 percent of the total extension of economic development aid by the Communist countries and a minute amount of drawings on this aid, during the last year Algeria was host to the third largest contingent of Communist economic technicians and ranked first among the recipients of nonproject aid personnel. Of approximately 1,600 Communist economic technicians estimated to have been present in Algeria during the last half of 1964 (not including Chinese), only about 50 were engaged in project-type activity under economic aid credits; the remainder represented medical personnel, teachers, economic advisers, and voluntary labor brigades.

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A comparable organization reportedly exists in East Germany, composed largely of members of the East German youth organization (Freie Deutsche Jugend -- FDJ) and the central labor federation (Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund -- FDGB). In September 1964, several such groups were employed in a number of African countries and Cyprus, and 60 more youths reportedly were receiving training for service in Latin America. After completing this program they were to proceed to Havana for additional training prior to departure early in 1965 for employment as teachers, engineers, and doctors in Chile, Uruguay, and Mexico.

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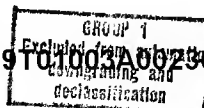
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